



**Matthew Bishop of Deddington
in Oxfordshire**

A forgotten voice from the 18th century

Brian Carter

THE
Life and Adventures
OF
MATTHEW BISHOP

OF
DEDDINGTON in *Oxfordshire.*

Containing an ACCOUNT of several Actions by
Sea, Battles and Sieges by Land, in which he
was present from 1701 to 1711, interspersed
with many curious Incidents, entertaining
Conversations and judicious Reflections.

Written by HIMSELF.

L O N D O N :

Printed for J. BRINDLEY in *New Bond-Street*; G. HAWKINS in *Fleet-Street*; R. DODSLEY in *Pall-Mall*; and
J. MILLAN opposite to the *Admiralty-Office.* 1744.

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**The Elmore Press
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Matthew Bishop's name first came to my attention about four years ago while I was working on *Printers and Publishers in Deddington 1840 – 2004*. Initially I assumed that, because Bishop's work was of a substantial nature from an important period in literary history, information on the man and his memoirs would be readily accessible; as this appeared not to be the case, the present work is offered in the hope that it will make a useful contribution towards filling the gap. 1st Oct 2008



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I am grateful to Oxfordshire Studies for permission to reproduce the title page of Matthew Bishop's *Life and Adventures* and to Oxfordshire County Council's Photographic Archives for permission to reproduce an image (c. 1840) of George Clarke of Scaldwell's painting of Deddington's Market Place.

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I

The name of Matthew Bishop is one that appears to be virtually unknown even to historians of Deddington; neither Mary Vane Turner, nor H M Colvin in their respective histories, nor more recently Deddington Map Group's *Discovering Deddington* (2000), make any reference to him. His name and claim to fame have slipped even from the footnotes of history into oblivion. Matthew Bishop, however, should be remembered both for literary and historical reasons; and his reputation would rest on his autobiographical work published in London in 1744,

The Life and Adventures of Matthew Bishop of Deddington in Oxfordshire. Containing an account of several actions by sea, battles and sieges by land, in which he was present from 1701 to 1711, interspersed with many curious incidents, entertaining conversations and judicious reflections. Written by Himself. Printed for J. Brindley in New Bond Street; G Hawkins in Fleet Street; R. Dodsley in Pall-Mall and J. Millan opposite to the Admiralty-Office ... London 1744.

This is a fairly substantial book of nearly three hundred pages, and is dedicated “To the Earl of Stair Field Marshal and Commander in Chief of his Majestys Forces in South Britain.”

The publisher in his address to the reader explained how some authors tended to cast their own characters to “best advantage” in order to “delight and

captivate the reader, make them have recourse to adventures really surprising, but merely fictitious” (p.v.), and thus, proceeding in that manner, tended to appeal to the “over credulous and ignorant class of readers, who believe in heroes who never existed, and whose achievements can never be equalled.” (p.v.) He pointed out that Bishop, on the other hand, was among a class of writers whose approach was marked out by a “strict adherence to truth...” Furthermore the truth of Bishop’s narrative could be verified as the events he described were fairly recent and therefore could be authenticated by others who lived through them and any “misrepresentation of the principal facts” could be exposed. Additionally, he drew attention to a characteristic of Bishop who wrote “without partiality in his own favour [and] exhibits both the good and bad of his own conduct.” (p.vii). The publisher concluded his remarks by asking the reader to excuse any defects in Bishop’s literary abilities by making due allowances for “one in his sphere” and, given Bishop’s “unbiased regard to truth,” he hoped any “transgressions in style will be sufficiently compensated thereby...” (p.viii).

Bishop opened his narrative by identifying his birthplace, “In the year 1701 I left the place of my nativity, Deddington in Oxfordshire...” He departed against the wishes of his parents but he had a yearning to go to sea and earn his fortune in some “noble exploit.” He made for Canterbury to stay with relations, possibly publicans, who lived at the sign of The Three Kings. While he was there he described how King William III passed through the city and Bishop, with patriotic enthusiasm, “gathered all the flowers out of our garden and several more to adorn the High Street as he came along...”

Clearly Bishop was a restless young man and, in a neatly turned phrase, described himself as “being of a rambling disposition” and as such took himself off to a distant relative, a Mr Davill of Trenly Park. Here he was given a position as overseer or foreman to ten men: he had hardly begun work before he was off, this time to a Mr Bicks of Fordige [Fordwich?] two miles from Canterbury, where he worked in a counting-house for two weeks but the thought of life on the sea “made him unfit for any other,” despite Mr Bicks’s views to the contrary. He moved on again for a short period to stay with an aunt at Wye near Ashford, where he told her

of his “fixed resolution” of going to war as a sailor. She also tried to dissuade him and told Bishop that better was expected of him as he had been given an “education and a trade.” Her admonitions had the effect of alienating him: as he expressed it, “These daily checks on my inclination made me quite weary of her company.” (p.8.) Leaving his aunt, he went on to his uncle [Nicholls], a farmer at Harrison [possibly Harrietsham], a village about eight miles south east of Maidstone in Kent.

Bishop joins the Navy

He got on well with his uncle despite his also trying unsuccessfully to dissuade him from going to sea, and soon he was off again, this time to Chatham with a view to enlisting on the *Swift Snow*, a ship under the command of a Captain Wynn. That was in February 1702, Bishop having presented himself in the first instance to the Muster Master, Mr Gregory. He was posted temporarily to a man-of-war, the *Princess Anne*, before transferring to the *Swift Snow*.

Continuing his narrative, Bishop laid out his plan for the memoirs which were “to relate all my adventures both by sea and land, from the beginning to the end of the wars”; furthermore he would mention only “what I was eye-witness to...” (p.5.) By proceeding in this way Bishop was in a position to assure his readers that they could then “depend on the truth” of the narrative. The war Bishop referred to is usually known as the War of Spanish Succession, which involved many of the European powers. Hostilities began in 1702 and were not concluded until 1713 with the Peace, or Treaty, of Utrecht, a highly complex settlement which resolved monarchical, constitutional and territorial issues; one of the more minor aspects of this settlement entailed the ceding of Gibraltar to Great Britain. During the war numerous engagements took place both on land and at sea and many famous battles were fought, among them Blenheim, Ramillies, Oudenard and Malplaquet. Trench warfare was one of the features of the fighting in Flanders at that time, and where one hundred years later the Battle of Waterloo was fought, and two hundred years later was to sustain even bloodier battles and trench warfare in the Great War of 1914-18.

Bishop's ship the *Swift Snow* joined the fleet at Spithead under the command of Sir John Rook, which lay there with three squadrons of men-of-war. The fleet made for Rota in Spain, and Bishop related how he volunteered to join a group of twenty Pioneers who were to land and go ahead as a scouting party. He described one incident where the men concealed themselves overnight in a building and by chance he came across sixty 'pieces of eight'. He shared the news of his good fortune with one other person and gave him five 'pieces of eight' to ensure his silence. He went on to reveal, however, that while he slept that night all the gold coins were taken from him: he reflected on this hard lesson, and disclosed how he "resolved to be very cautious whom to trust in the future," and to keep everyone "at a distance". He found that this attitude had gained him "more friends than ever."

The fleet limped back to Portsmouth for repairs after a fierce naval engagement; later, in 1703, his ship rejoined the fleet under the command of Sir Cloudesley Shovel, where they made for Gibraltar and engaged the French fleet: "...we were about fifty sail of the line of battle." (p.21.) Bishop was injured by a cannon ball and his wound dressed with a "red plaister". On returning to the deck he observed that the ship was "like a slaughter house;" and following the engagement the fleet made for Lisbon for repairs to be carried out "...so ended the bravest engagement ever known since the memory of man..." (p.23.) He was proud to quote one of the officers, "I like you Bishop, said he, because your courage exceeds all I ever saw." (p.24.) He also shared with the reader his recollection that "...officers liked to converse with me, and the sailors were always glad to be in my company." (p.24.)

Returning to England in 1703, he enquired about the Eddystone lighthouse which he had not seen on his return voyage, only to discover, as he related, that it "had been blown down in the late storm." [Eddystone was the first British off shore lighthouse illuminated in 1698. The designer was the eccentric Henry Winstanley (1644-1703) who was on his way to the lighthouse on the day of the Great Storm on 26 November 1703. Such was its ferocity that it demolished the 120ft lighthouse, and Winstanley himself was drowned. Sir Cloudesley Shovel (1650-1707) had an equally, perhaps even more, tragic end. Admiral Shovel, successful, stern but

charismatic, was one of the outstanding naval officers of his time. In 1707 he led an allied force which destroyed the French Mediterranean fleet, and what was not destroyed the French scuttled. In the same year he was shipwrecked off the Scillies, but managed to reach a beach alive but exhausted where (according to legend) he was murdered by a woman for a ring he was wearing. He was buried in Westminster Abbey.]

As for Bishop, around 1704/5 his “rambling disposition” was working on him once again, and he described how he had “an itching desire to be with the Duke of Marlborough...” (p. 36) on account of his belief that there was not much more to be done at sea given the successes gained so far; he also added “...I loved nothing on earth so well as moving from one place to another...” (p.38). Bishop recounted how, while the fleet sailed between Malaga, Gibraltar and west of “the Streights” in order to confine the French navy, the crew on account of the length of time they were at sea had to exist on very short rations. Some men asked him how it was that he remained so cheerful while others were melancholic and downcast: he answered “I told them, my inward man supported my spirits” (p.34). For the time being he remained with the naval services. He recorded his misgivings about the French during a temporary lull in hostilities; he thought them “facinorous and villainous enough to destroy us behind our backs...” (p.39). Bishop also conveyed his own self confidence where he recalled a conversation with his ship’s Captain, then promoted to Commodore. He seemed to treat him as an equal: “ ‘Sir,’ replied I, ‘I am glad to hear your observations in regard to your men; it shows your respect to them.’ ” (p.39).

On transferring to the *Ipswich*, and then to the *Breda*, he recounted how the captain of the *Ipswich* was reluctant to let him go as, in the captain’s words, as reported to Bishop, he was “the best man that ever went into a ship and will be of more service to me than twenty others.” (p.42.) In 1706 he transferred to the *Fox* and one of his duties was to go ashore in Ireland as part of a press-gang, first in Cove and then at Waterford.

Bishop comes across as a great talker and someone full of plans, stratagems and opinions, to the extent that he records how on one occasion a passenger on

board ship would not join in any more of his “confabulations.”

Anchored off Cove he was sent ashore as part of a press-gang; he related how he put into practice an idea of his to aid them in their task. He called for a “a fiddle, hautboy and a pair of bag-pipes.” With these playing and with a plentiful supply of drink he anticipated a large crowd in good spirits, resulting in his being able to report that many volunteers came forward. Another press-gang had only been able to secure “three clumsy fellows.” (p.58.) He described a further one of his plans and how it unfolded when working in a press-gang in Waterford: he proposed the idea of a football match between his group in the press-gang and the locals whom he hoped to enlist. The match was to be twelve a side; the locals accepted the challenge but before starting to play, Bishop suggested they all go for a drink. During the drinking session the topic of enlisting and press-gangs were introduced. A fight ensued followed by more drinking, by which time the locals were persuaded that it would be better if they volunteered rather than be press-ganged. There is no record of the outcome of the football match, but all the men volunteered.

With the successes of Cove and Waterford behind him, Bishop was sent on a further press-gang mission to Dublin. A contingent of men was put ashore which divided into two groups, one under a lieutenant and the other under Bishop. This time he devised a new line of approach: once again he used the sociable setting of men drinking and then presented them with the chance of a free passage to England. Bishop related how he persuaded these men to go on board, and then the captain was able to make an address to these unsuspecting but potential recruits. Apparently Bishop obtained the captain’s agreement that when he, the captain, addressed this gathering he would give no indication that Bishop was a member of the crew. Bishop quotes the captain’s enthusiastic appreciation of this successful recruiting drive, twenty five men having joined up,

...Bishop, thou are the greatest artist that ever was born, for to unite such a body of men as these are. I cannot conceive your genius for it is miraculous and unconceiveable how you should get so many men and the Lieutenant and mate so few. (p.77.)

The men were “extremely sorry to find that I was going to leave them...” and two men whom he had helped rescue from the sea had “tears in their eyes.” (p.82.) The captain had already told Bishop that “...when you are gone I shall never get such another.”

Marriage

At some time during 1706 he returned home to Deddington to visit his parents and discovered that his father had died. He was intent on returning to the war, despite his mother’s distress at his leaving home once again. He described his return to Chatham, a journey that took him two days; clearly part of his keenness to return was to meet the girl he wished to marry, Sarah, “an old sweetheart,” daughter of John Dickers. Bishop described her as very well educated, and as having been brought up by her grandfather, James Jackman. They married, but nevertheless he was still intent on returning to the war, this time satisfying his desire to join the “land services.”

Bishop’s description of the immediate consequences of his marriage to Sarah are confusing. It would appear that he married without her grandfather’s knowledge, who having heard of it two days after the event “fell into a great rage” (p.85.) and threw her out of the house: and came at Bishop with a loaded gun, but Bishop managed to disarm him. He then called on his uncle to act as an intermediary; a reconciliation was achieved, and Bishop was then asked what of his future? His response was that he had to go “to Deddington to settle some affairs there, and afterwards do anything that would be agreeable to them.” (p.108.) The grandfather, Bishop reported, went to his ‘scrutore’ [a secure chest, desk or safe] and gave him £50, with an attached note payable thirty days later for another £50. There were further indications given that when he returned and if he settled down and turned out to be a good husband, the grandfather would leave his entire estate to Sarah. Clearly Bishop gave the impression that his plans coincided with those of the grandfather but, added Bishop, “he meant one thing and I another.” He had confided to his uncle, though not his wife, that he still intended to join the army.

Bishop joins the Army

Before embarking on that path he, his wife and her maid went to Deddington via Oxford, where they remained for four or five days “to view the Colleges and whatever was observable.” (p.112). Bishop recalled that while in Oxford they met up with an officer who was staying at the same inn and “...who joined company, breakfasted and dined and supped with us all the time we were there.” Apparently he advised Bishop to purchase a commission and on the day they parted company, they drank “a bottle of Sack” after breakfast before they went their separate ways. Bishop went on to add that after he had gone only two miles he realised he had forgotten to ask the officer for his name or regiment; and also hinted that he rather regretted having his wife with him as clearly he felt he had struck a particular rapport with the officer.

In Deddington he made a will leaving everything to his wife and his mother. He had found his mother in a poor state, and in order to cheer her up (and his wife also) he contacted his aunt who was “a merry companion.” When she came to visit, Bishop supplied wine, they played whist and sang songs; and before his “Aunt Smith” left, he invited her to share with him a glass of “usquebaugh” [whisky]. In his memoir, Bishop quoted a 22-line poem which he composed for his wife and which she may well not have appreciated; the poem, written before he left for the army, included the following lines:

For you, to whom I ever shall be true:
But yet my Queen expect my duty too.
Her service now has called me aside,
And of the two I must neglect my Bride. (p.119).

It was not long before he had extricated himself from Deddington, leaving his wife behind with his mother, and set off for London, stopping in Oxford on the way. He described looking out in Oxford for anyone recruiting for the army; and how he met a sergeant and, inter alia, how Bishop drank the pub landlord

under the table, the landlord becoming so “prodigious drunk” (p.120.) that he had to be carried out. The sergeant had noticed the “cockade” in Bishop’s hat and assumed he was an officer, and told him he could only recruit for men for Captain Bescheser’s Company, and not for officers. Bishop elaborated on the meandering route he took to London accompanied by the sergeant, who was from “the Queen’s marching regiment of foot,” calling in at Tetsworth, High Wickham, Stokenchurch and Uxbridge in a search for new recruits, Bishop using his money to buy drinks as encouragement for men to sign up.

Eventually reaching London, he achieved his objective and joined the land-services, boarding a “hoy” (p.136) [a small sloop for carrying passengers] which took him and the other recruits to Harwich; then to Helvoet Sluice and Sash Ghent, from where they marched to Ghent. Bishop wrote an interesting even if rather opaque sentence early in his twentieth chapter which suggested that some had questioned the truthfulness of his memoirs as he had recounted them; “...the relation is my own, and I never will disown any fact contained in it, [and] shall receive an additional comfort to my veracity if I live to see and answer all the objections and aspersions cast upon my character.” (p.147). Continuing his narrative, he recorded that he was posted to fight in Flanders: on his way to Brussels he was captured for a short period, and described what was to him a great personal loss when he had taken from him his “silver snuff-box in which my wife’s picture was concealed.” Bishop also described how he was beaten up by his captors (“partisans”) and when later discovered by some French soldiers, his belongings were returned to him. A French officer ordered Bishop to remove his shirt in order to examine the effects of his beating and saw that “my flesh appeared like a Negro’s” (p.152.): the officer had the two “partisans” arrested for their ill treatment. Bishop described how he later escaped through some woods.

He fought at the battle of Oudenard in 1708, and at Malplaquet in 1709 where he described ferocious fighting; in one engagement he wrote “my right and left hand men were shot dead.” He called back, “...Come on, boys, make good the front.” (p.211) and two of those replacements were also shot dead. At about this time Bishop reflected on how an “insignificant fellow” as himself could have such

influence over men: it was a gift “...I have always thought it a blessing from the Almighty..” (p.207); and following the Battle of Malplaquet, he once again averted to a religious context. “We fought the battle but I will acknowledge that God gave the victory, for without Him we could have done nothing for ourselves.” (p.209). He described trench warfare where sandbags provided protection for gunmen and the trench floors were covered with ‘fascines’ [tied bundles of brushwood] and these in turn overlaid with ‘flakes’ [wattle fencing or boards] to provide firm footing for troop movements. He revealed that, when in the army, he clearly never forgot his naval experiences, nor was anyone else spared his recollections with the result that he was referred to as “Sir Cloudesley.”

While describing aspects of the campaign in Flanders, Bishop disclosed more information about himself, even if not directly. He wrote early on that he had successfully served his apprenticeship in a trade before joining the fighting forces, but without stating which it was: perhaps as a farrier? At the time of the Battle of Oudenard he described seeing a stray horse some distance away that he thought might be quite valuable as part of the spoils of war, but approaching closer he saw that the horse had been shot in the thigh and recorded that “I did not think myself farrier sufficient or good enough to cure him.” (p.162). As to his own progress he hinted while describing the siege at Tournay that he was then a corporal. Unusually, he also named two friends, a James Lamb from his own regiment and a Sergeant Redley, “a particular friend” from Lord Hartford’s Regiment who had been seriously injured in the fighting. Bishop also revealed his own attitude to the enemy wounded in battle, when he described coming across two seriously injured Frenchmen; he did what he could to make them comfortable and found them some clothing. The Frenchmen thanked him profusely, but Bishop recorded that “...there was no need for all these thanks, when a man is bound in duty to be humane.” (p.217).

New England and Canada

At the end of 1711, the Duke of Marlborough was dismissed from all his posts, and during that year Bishop came under the command of Brigadier Hill and

Admiral Walker on an expedition to New England and Canada. Bishop had actively sought this posting and appeared to have joined Colonel Kaine's Regiment. This ill-fated expedition was just one episode in an endless series of battles, campaigns and skirmishes carried out in Canada and North America between the British and French, with the Native American Indians inevitably drawn in on one side or the other when it proved impossible for them to maintain neutrality.

In the previous year, 1710, four Sachems – North American Indian Chiefs from the Iroquois Confederacy – had come to London to supplicate Queen Anne and request that more troops be sent to drive the French out of Canada. The Sachems presented themselves to the Queen in full feathered headdress and other traditional attire. Interestingly, the Sachems or Chiefs were chosen by the women of each tribe; perhaps an “Indian king” referred to by Bishop may have been one of the Sachems, although more likely to have been a chief from the Narragansett or Niantic tribes who had been dominant in Rhode Island for much of the 17th century.

Bishop did not mention which ship he sailed on in their seven weeks' journey to Rhode Island, but he referred later to “our ship the *Globe*.” The complement of men comprised seven regiments of foot, “...Kirk's, Seymour's, Hill's, Disney's, Windress's, Clayton's and Kaine's” (p.243.) and a battalion of marines under Colonel Churchill. Bishop described a remarkable scene where an Indian king came to view or review the troops, but they were not able to see him clearly as “he had a veil that covered his face,” and his secretary was “painted with redde and had a crow-quill stuck in his hair bare headed.” (p.242.) He added a further significant detail relating to the Indian king carrying out a ceremonial inspection of the British troops:

As soon as he passed our Regiment, our orders were to follow him along the line, and our officers by way way of compliment went front and rear with him that gave the Indian King a great deal of satisfaction, and the sight of him pleased us all... (p.244.)

Bishop's use of the title “King” in relation to Indian Chiefs is not as curious as it may seem. Interestingly, in 1675/6 there was an uprising against the British by some

Indian tribes under Metacom, the chief Sachem of the Wampanoags. Metacom was referred to as “King Philip” by the British, and the whole two years uprising was known as King Philip’s War.

On July 30th 1711, the expeditionary force set sail from Boston for the assault on Quebec but before reaching their destination, the entire fleet was engulfed in thick fog in the Gulf of St Lawrence. This great danger was compounded by the rise of a violent storm which dispersed the fleet: many ships foundered and almost a thousand lives were lost. A contributory factor in this disaster was deemed to be the poor seamanship skills of Admiral Sir Hovenden Walker. The consequence of this “magnificent fiasco” of 23 August 1711 was that there was no assault on Quebec, and the inadequately provisioned force was dispersed in some disarray. The French in Quebec attributed their salvation to divine intervention. (Such assistance did not come to them in 1759 when General Wolfe was victorious on the Plains of Abraham and Quebec was surrendered.)

As for Bishop’s role in the storm-wrecked attempt of 1711, he supplied a lengthy description of the effects of the storm on the fleet and the influential part he felt he had played in preserving the ship on which he was being carried. At the height of the storm, Bishop heard the cry that there was a ship on the “larboard bow” [on the left or port side]. The Captain gave certain orders but Bishop, who had put “a glass before my eyes,” saw that it was not a ship but rocks that were looming on the larboard bow. Bishop conveyed the impression that he took command,

knowing that these were not times to delay was determined with a full resolution to turn commander myself, and if I had not we should have been upon the breakers in a short time... (pp.248/9.)

The ship saved from destruction, Bishop recollected in his customary fashion, the words of his captain, shipmates and soldiers:

...they congratulated each other upon their good fortune of having such a man as me on board. (p.249.)

Domestic turmoil

Bishop's time in the service of the crown was now drawing to a close, and he came back to England in 1712. He was posted to Dunkirk, where he made reference to a small mutiny taking place, before finally returning for good to England in 1713. He had now not seen his wife for six years. Although he wrote to her on two or three occasions, that seems to have been the extent of his contact, and he closed one of these letters to her with the valedictory line, "Yours for ever, not forgetting my mother".

It appears that he may have had something of a guilty conscience over this neglect of his wife. Instead of going directly to her following his return to England he decided to visit his uncle in the first instance. His uncle lived in Harrison [possibly Harrietsham] a village about eight miles south east of Maidstone in Kent; he received a warm welcome but with reproach for the way he had made such little contact with his wife over the previous six years. And then came two startling pieces of news. First he learned he had a son, "a pretty boy"; and then the stunning blow: his wife had remarried and was expecting a child. His uncle related that she had been told he was dead, and that furthermore two soldiers had sworn an affidavit that he had died in Flanders and his body buried at St Peter's Hill in Ghent. There seemed no room for doubt: one of the soldiers even attested that he had assisted at the burial. His uncle related that his wife had come to Kent to see her grandfather before he died, and that he had left his estate to her, but added that subsequently the new husband was riding to hounds, and eroding his wife's capital (p.268.)

Bishop, utterly confounded and amazed, recounted how he determined on going to see his wife immediately but was constrained by his uncle who suggested a more circuitous approach to this delicate but potentially fraught meeting. The proposed plan was for Bishop's uncle to go in advance to Maidstone and tell his wife that he had a friend with him who wished to see her and commiserate on the death of her first husband; this "friend" had known him well and was anxious to see her. To add to the scenario, Bishop went in disguise wearing a wig provided by his uncle.

Bishop described the outcome of this bizarre encounter. His wife recognised him almost instantly after he had spoken only a few words and “swooned away,” collapsed, and died three days later, but not before conveying to Bishop that, as far as the second husband was concerned “she could not endure him in her sight” (p.270.) Her final words to Bishop were, “My dear, forgive me, and all is well.”

This virtually concluded Bishop’s narrative. In the final few pages, he shared with the reader a number of thoughts on the nature of a just war and the role and duty of the ordinary man (“the insignificant fellow”, as he described himself earlier). He called on a variety of figures, both Old Testament and New, as well as classical exemplars, David, Jephtha, Isocrates, Diocletian, etc., to illustrate and support the points he was making. Just wars drew forth heroic qualities in the individual.

The account of his life and adventures ends where it began, in Deddington. He related how, after his wife’s burial, he “made all preparation I could in order to go to the place of my nativity and ever after I declined mentioning this to anyone, till I now recount it to the world.” (p.272.)

Such then is this brief summary of a little over a decade of Bishop’s life as recollected some thirty to forty years after the events he described. Questions arise, however, as to whether the nature of the narrative reflects the actual experience of Matthew Bishop: is it possible that his *Life and Adventures* are more fiction than fact?

II

Who, then, was Matthew Bishop?

The publisher, in his address to the reader, while attempting to allay such fears only raises doubts. Why was he so keen to anticipate and scotch the idea in the mind of any reader who might think the memoirs fictitious? He assured the reader that Bishop, unlike some, was among a class of writers marked out by their “strict adherence to truth.” As to its literary quality and any “transgressions in stile” allowances could be made on account of its having been written “from one in his sphere.” All these potential defects could be excused, claimed the publisher, on account of Bishop’s “unbiased regard to truth”. (p.viii.) As a clinching argument for any doubters as to the veracity of events described in Bishop’s text, the publisher pointed out that the “principal facts” could be authenticated by others as they occurred within the living memory of those who could either verify them, or expose them as false. The publisher, having clearly stated his position as to the genuineness of the memoirs, was followed by Bishop who reinforced that view. Early in his memoirs, Bishop assured his readers that they could “depend on the truth” of his narrative as he was going to describe only what he had been “eye-witness to.” (p.5.)

In an interesting article in the Second Series of the *Retrospective Review* of 1828, Bishop’s book was described as a “discovery”: the reviewer was attracted by Bishop and called him

a perfect original, and in his description of his own exploits was unconsciously giving an extremely laughable sketch of the peculiarities of the British sailor. (p.43.)

He was also “a brave boaster,” but the reviewer placed special value on the memoirs as providing the unusual perspective of those of a “common” soldier and sailor. There was no suggestion from the reviewer that the work may have been fiction rather than fact.

If Bishop was a “discovery” to the reviewer of one hundred and eighty years ago, then the intervening years have returned him to the obscurity from which he was extracted. What do we know of Bishop and can he be identified with Deddington? An ideal candidate is revealed in the Deddington parochial records.

A Matthew Bishop was baptised on the sixteenth of September 1683, the son of Ralph and Elizabeth. As far as one can tell he had brothers and sisters, who all died in infancy apart from a sister, Mary, who may have lived into adulthood. Bishop made no reference to any immediate family other than his parents; he mentioned the death of his father, presumably in Deddington, in the early 1700s, between 1701 and 1706 although there is no entry of this in the parochial records. Bishop provided only the scantiest of details of his life outside the years 1701 to 1713 when he was in the services; we can be confident, however, that this Matthew Bishop from Deddington would have been about eighteen in 1701, exactly the right age for the start of his adventures.

Moving to the end of his narrative there is a possible similar congruence between the official records and what he related. Bishop concluded the active part of his *Life and Adventures* with reference to his wife’s death in early 1713 and his immediate return to Deddington. Once again, records provide possible supporting evidence and disclose that a Matthew Bishop married Elizabeth Bazeley (Basely) on 27th December 1713. In October 1714 they had a daughter, Dinah, baptised on 9th October; and in the following year a son John, baptised on 20th November 1715. There are no further references to the Bishops in the Deddington records after this, either of births or deaths. In the light of Bishop’s character and “rambling disposition” it would be no surprise to learn that he and his family moved away, although he leaves the impression in his narrative that when he returned to Deddington in 1713, he remained until his *Life and Adventures* was published in 1744.

Verifying the facts

As for his narrative, there are possible ways of helping to secure the text as an authentic account of actual events in which Bishop participated. He mentions

various ships in which he served, or was temporarily posted to: fortunately there are several modern reference books supplying crucial details. The first is David J. Lyon, *The Sailing Navy List*. All the ships of the Royal Navy built, purchased and captured, 1688-1860 [Conway Maritime Press 1993]; and the second, J.J. Colledge, *Ships of the Royal Navy*. The complete record of all fighting ships of the Royal Navy. Revised by Lt. Cdr. Ben Warlow. [Greenhill Books, London 2003].

Bishop recollected that he had wished to serve on the *Swift Snow*, and in this he was successful after a temporary posting on the *Princess Anne*. Unfortunately, neither Colledge nor Lyon lists the *Swift Snow*; the *Princess Anne* is listed in both, in Lyon as a hospital ship, and Colledge noting that its name was changed in March 1702 to the *Windsor Castle*. In 1704/5, Bishop described transferring between the *Ipswich* and the *Breda[h]*, before serving on the *Fox* in 1706, which included a pressgang mission to Ireland. Both the *Ipswich* and *Breda[h]* are described in both reference books as 70 gun (3rd rate) “men-of-war”. The *Fox*, (a ‘6th rate’) a much smaller craft, is also referred to, but they both report it as having been wrecked in 1706.

Bishop described the seven weeks it took to sail to Rhode Island in 1711, possibly on the *Globe*; neither Colledge nor Lyon lists any such vessel. In his narrative Bishop referred to several other ships which he saw or boarded at some time: the *Raylstone*, *Content*, *Mary*, *Worcester*, *Barbados*, but none of these are mentioned in either reference work as ships sailing at that period. Such disparity between claims and their verification undermines one’s confidence in the reliability of Bishop’s memory, if that is what he was depending on.

While Bishop introduced the names of various warships in which he served, curiously he was somewhat reticent when he came to naming the regiments or units he served in. He lists, for example, the various regiments that embarked for the Canadian expedition but it is a little difficult to identify which is the one he served in, possibly Kaine’s. He referred to “our Regiment” or “the Regiment I belonged to” rather than by name, which is odd given how simple it would have been to identify one. This absence of significant detail is maintained in another area where there are several references in Bishop’s narrative to senior figures in the Army and

Navy: Cloudesley Shovel, John Rook, and others, but virtually no one is named with whom he served alongside in either service over a twelve year period, apart from James Lamb and Sergeant Redley.

The publishers claimed that the “principal facts” could be authenticated by anyone who lived through those times is somewhat undermined by the absence of the names of a person who could have verified Bishop’s participation and accounts of events he described. In reality, the “principal facts” in Bishop’s narrative are historical ones; the battles, campaigns, and names of the principal commanders, from the Duke of Marlborough downwards, none of whom required “authentication”, and thereby render the publishers’ remark rather misleading as it implies more than is justified with regard to Bishop’s personal involvement. As for family members mentioned in the text, almost all would have been dead by the time his book was published; moreover, no one would have had any first hand account of his time in the services. If his deficiencies as a letter writer to his wife are indicative, then it is highly unlikely that he corresponded with anyone else describing aspects of his life and times as a fighting man. Concerning the brief but dramatic description of his return in disguise to see his wife, who might there be now still alive, thirty years later, who witnessed the event? His wife was dead, probably also his uncle; and his son, even if present, would have been too young to remember.

Bishop and the literary tradition

For another perspective on the nature of Bishop’s work it may be helpful to examine its place in the 18thC literary tradition and, more specifically, its place in the chronology of works that shared similarly worded titles. A 17thC precursor of such 18thC works appeared in 1657 with the English translation from the French by John Davies of Kidwelly of the original Spanish satiric novel by Quevedo Villegas, *The Life and Adventures of Buscon*. Spain also provided another 17thC work, a classic in world literature, *Don Quixote*. There was an earlier 17thC English translation, but in 1709/10 a new translation appeared with an altered title: *The life and notable adventures of that renown’d Knight Don Quixote de La Mancha*. In 1709 two further

‘Life and Adventures’ were also published, as shown on the following list, which is not exhaustive, but gives a substantial cross section of books published from the early 18thC to the date of Bishop’s work in 1744, all of which include both the words ‘Life’ and ‘Adventures’ in their titles.

Avery, John

The life and adventures of Capt Avery London 1709

Olivier, Abbé.

Memoirs of the life and adventures of Signor Rozelli London 1709

Cervantes, Miguel de

The life and notable adventures of that
renown’d knight, don Quixote de la Mancha London 1709/10

Dolben, John

The life and adventures of John Dolben London 1710

[Defoe, Daniel]

The life and strange surprizing adventures of
Robinson Crusoe London 1719

Mead, Richard.

The life and adventures of Don Bilioso de L’Estomac London 1719

[Defoe, Daniel]

The history of the life and adventures of Mr
Duncan Campbell London 1720

[Defoe, Daniel]

The life, adventures, and pyracies of Captain
Singleton London 1720

Aubin, Penelope.

The Noble Slaves; or, The lives and adventures
of two Lords and two Ladies London 1722

[Aubin, Penelope].

The life and amorous adventures of Lucinda London 1722

- Thibault.
 The life and adventures of Pedrillo del Campo London 1723
- E, G.
 Authentic memoirs of the life and surprising
 adventures of John Sheppard. 2nd Ed. London 1724
- Trezz, Juliani de [pseud] ...
 The life and surprizing adventures of don Juliani
 de Trezz London c.1725
- Tormes, Lazarillo [pseud?].
 The life and adventures of Lazarillo de Tormes London 1726
- Aubin, Penelope
 The life and adventures of the Lady Lucy London 1726
- Archer, Didimy [pseud?].
 The life and adventures of Didimy Archer Edinburgh 1728
- Aubin, Penelope.
 The life and adventures of the young Count
 Albertus London 1728
- Grigg, William
 The life and humorous adventures of William Grigg London 1733
- Prevost d'Exiles, Antoine Francois
 The life and entertaining adventures of
 Mr Cleveland London 1734/5
- [Noake, Dorothy]
 The life and adventures of the Marchioness Urbino London 1735
- de Marivauz, Pierre.
 The life of Marianne; or the adventures of the
 Countess of *** London 1736
- Davies, Christian.
 The life and adventures of Mrs Christian Davies,
 commonly call'd Mother Ross London 1740

Langley, Gilbert.

The life and surprizing adventures of
Gilbert Langley

London c.[1740]

Lovejoy, Roger.

The Progress of nature exemplify'd in the Life
and surprizing adventures of Roger Lovejoy

London 1744

Bishop, Matthew.

The life and adventures of Matthew Bishop
of Deddington

London 1744

The majority of these titles are works of fiction although not all, a few were pamphlets rather than books: for example John Avery's 1709 work runs to only eight pages. There was a Henry Avery better known as 'Captain' John Avery, a mutineer and pirate in the 1690s, who was later tried at the Old Bailey and executed in 1696. His colourful life gave rise to an almost instant folklore relating to his exploits, some probably true, others conjectural.

In 1710 another short work appeared: *The Life and Adventures of John Dolben*, a political pamphlet relating to John Dolben, Member of Parliament for the Cornish seat of Liskeard. His claim to fame or notoriety rested on his role in the impeachment of Dr Henry Sacheverell for preaching two sermons deemed to contain seditious libels. Although he was suspended from preaching for three years, Sacheverell's cause had great popular support, even leading to rioting as well as creating a vigorous pamphlet war, of which the Dolben pamphlet was one.

The Life of Mrs Christian Davies published in 1740 was a fascinating book, but one whose authorship has remained a matter of contention. For about two hundred years it was thought to have been written by Daniel Defoe, but in more recent times this autobiographical work of 'Life and Adventures' has been attributed to Christian herself. In ascribing the work to her, however, the difficulty is also acknowledged of disentangling fact from fantasy in her narrative. Christian Davies, née Cavanaugh, married a Richard Welsh and they had two children: Richard Welsh left home and ended up enlisting in the army and fought in Flanders. Christian

made arrangements for her family and settled her affairs in Dublin; she followed her husband to Flanders where she also joined the army, under the name of Christopher Welsh, and, in this cross-dressing role, fought in several campaigns during the 1690s without her secret being revealed. She returned home to Dublin for three or four years only to rejoin Marlborough's forces in 1701; and fought in Flanders for over ten years despite her secret being discovered by a surgeon in 1706 after she sustained an injury at the Battle of Ramillies. Christian remained in Flanders although her husband was killed in 1709 at the Battle of Malplaquet (where Bishop also fought). She remarried, this time to a Grenadier, Hugh Jones, who in turn was killed during the Siege of St Venant in 1710. Eventually returning to Dublin, Christian married for a third time, once again to a soldier by the name of Davies. They saw out their days together as Chelsea Pensioners and she died in 1739.

Dianne Dugaw writes in the new *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* that in her *Life and adventures*, Christian Davies had written a "biographical history in the picaresque mode" where she clearly "mixes, in an ultimately undeterminable ratio, elements of fact with legends..." Dugaw continues that although she was a remarkable person,

...the masquerading Davies specialized in fabrications in her actions and undoubtedly in her reporting of those actions.

If Christian Davies is difficult to assess, the same can also be said of a work by Gilbert Langley. Langley's account of his *Life and surprising adventures*, was written in 1739, apparently in Maidstone Gaol while awaiting sentence of death for robbery. There are some grounds for believing that the account he details of his own exploits may rest more on fact than fiction. He gave a quite detailed description of his schooldays: following some private tuition as a small boy, he attended Mr Adam's School in Red Lion Street before he was sent to Charterhouse. His father, Holdenly Langley, not satisfied with his development there, decided to send him to the Benedictine school at Doway in Flanders, which had been established in 1607 for the education of Roman Catholic boys from England. In the new post reformation order, Roman Catholics were a proscribed people and any profession of Catholicism was illegal, and subject to the most severe penalties. It is not clear why

Langley was sent to Doway, but he wrote that he met Fr Stourton in London and travelled back with him to the school and monastery at Doway where Fr Stourton was Prior. Langley gave a full description of the daily round at school, including the timetable, the subjects studied and a note of the fees (£25.00 per year), and also mentioned by name several of his friends. He provided vivid and colourful descriptions of various escapades he was involved in, one of which was when he got drunk in town and resulted in his being “smartly flogged” on his return to school. (p.20.) This chastisement left him feeling very disgruntled and made him uncooperative and he described how he refused to conform for several weeks until a Fr Howard took him in hand, loaned him books and nurtured him back into school life and to his studies. Soon after this episode his father summoned him home; Langley would have been sixteen or seventeen at the time (c.1726/7); he had enjoyed his time at school in Doway and related that when he left it was “with tears in my eyes.” (p.21.)

When Bishop wrote of his life and adventures, he was already in his sixties and recollecting events of forty years earlier, whereas Langley was writing only twelve to fifteen years after the events he described, when he was around thirty years old. Given the relative proximity between experiences and published narrative, it would have been relatively easy for discrepancies or inaccuracies to be brought to light given the number of people he identified by name.

As for most of the rest of the titles of this quite extensive list, they are works of fiction. Even those few narratives anchored to historical figures and events the actual or real is interpolated with the fanciful, making it difficult if not impossible to separate one from the other as, for example, in the cases of John Avery and Christian Davies. Of the undoubtedly fictional works, the classic *Don Quixote* was joined by *Robinson Crusoe* in the select canon of works of universal appeal and influence.

Daniel Defoe’s book was published pseudonymously in 1719 as *The life and strange surprizing adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, and it appeared ostensibly as a genuine work of autobiography. Such was Defoe’s power of storytelling and the persuasiveness of his narrative that a new resonance was given to any subsequent work incorporating in its title the words “life” and “adventures”. The combination

of these words in the title became indicators of the style of work on offer to the reader. An important part of Defoe's skill lay in the manner in which he conveyed the authorial voice as one relating a true story. Defoe, under the guise of the Editor of *Robinson Crusoe*, wrote in the Preface that he believed the account to be "a just history of fact; neither is there any appearance of fiction in it..." Subsequently this type of assertion became part of a ritual in the prefaces of other similar works in claiming authenticity for their texts. By Bishop's time, twenty five years after *Robinson Crusoe*, a certain posturing is indulged in by the publisher: he claimed genuineness and veracity for the book in hand compared with works which appealed to "an ignorant class of reader who believes in heroes who never existed." Bishop's publisher also identified key words that appeared in the *Crusoe* title, "strange surprizing adventures". Bishop, he wrote, would not have recourse to "adventures really surprizing, but merely fictitious."

Less than ten years after *Robinson Crusoe*, the pseudonymous author Didimy Archer employed a weary, disdainful approach when he assured his readers that his "life and adventures were accounts of matters of fact"; he wished to spare them from the usual

ridiculous pelting and banging people into a belief of the reality of what they relate by infinite asseverances, scattered from one to the other end of their writing, that they tell only the truth. (p.11.)

In another very popular novel, first published in the 1730s, *The life and entertaining adventures of Mr Cleveland*, purportedly written by the natural son of Oliver Cromwell, the editor made the usual remarks about authenticity, but adopted a new line when he wrote,

if not withstanding what has been said, the reader should still suspect the truth of some particulars, I yet am persuaded he will not think his time mis-spent in the perusal of the work. (p.xi.)

The editor of the pseudonymous work by Juliani de Trezz was altogether briefer in his comment in the preface, "Whether they are authentic or not I cannot say".

The development of the 'Lives and Adventures' genre continued well after

1744 until the end of the century although with slightly reducing frequency. As with those from the earlier pre-1744 period so with those from the later, and they were almost all works of fiction of which the following is a selection:

Carew, Bampfylde Moore.

The life and adventures of Bamfylde Moore Carew Exeter 1745

Wyatt, James

The life and surprizing adventures of James Wyatt London 1748

Kimber, Edward.

The life and adventures of Joe Thompson London 1750

Coventry, Francis

The history of Pompey the little; or the life and adventures of a lap-dog London 1751

Crawley, Thomas.

The life and adventures of Mademoiselle de la Sarre Rotterdam 1751

Poltock, Robert.

The life and adventures of Peter Wilkins London 1751

Bradstreet, Dudley

The life and uncommon adventures of Captain Dudley Bradstreet Dublin 1755

Kimber, Edward.

The life and adventures of James Ramble London 1755

Murray, Hamilton.

The life and real adventures of James Ramble London 1759

Smollett, Tobias

The life and adventures of Sir Lancelot Greaves London 1762

[Cobbett William].

The life and adventures of Peter Porcupine London 1797

Bampfylde Moore Carew is perhaps the exception although with qualifications. He had an even more varied and colourful life than Christian Davies and his *Life and*

adventures is equally problematic. Carew was the son of a Devonshire clergyman, and ran away from school, joined the gypsies and was subsequently elected as their ‘King’. Not long after elevation, he was arrested and convicted as “an idle vagrant” and transported to America, having already shown himself to be a serial con man with a theatrical flair. Escaping captivity he discovered some Indians, and their ‘King’ removed the iron yoke from around his neck. He later passed himself off as a Quaker as he moved to New York, from where he sailed to England, but not before avoiding the attentions of a press-gang by simulating the appearance of smallpox on his face. Henry Wilson (in his three-volume work, *Wonderful Characters*) wrote in 1821 of the humiliation of seeing the well connected but fallen Carew “lose sight of the moral principle”, and thus

unfit himself for the duties of his station, and at length expire without having once experienced the soothing consolation that results from the consciousness of a well spent life.

His *Life and adventures* are probably about as reliable as he himself was untrustworthy.

Of the other titles in the list it is probably Coventry’s *Life and adventures of a lap-dog* that sets this style of book most firmly within the area of fiction.

By placing Bishop’s work in a broader context, it is easy to appreciate that it falls into a well established and vigorous memoir, or memoir novel, tradition. To further illustrate the richness of this particular tradition within the spectrum of the mid 18thC novel, the following is a selection where titles include either the word ‘adventures’ or ‘life’.

[Chetwood, William Rufus]		
The voyages, dangerous adventures and		
miraculous escapes of Capt Richard Falconer		London 1720
Fielding, Henry		
The history of the adventures of Joseph Andrews		London 1742
Fielding, Sarah		
The adventures of David Simple		London 1744

Smollett, Tobias	
The adventures of Roderick Random	London 1748
Le Sage, Alain-René	
The adventures of Gil Blas of Santillane	
[translated by Tobias Smollett]	London 1748/9
Smollett, Tobias	
The adventures of Peregrine Pickle	London 1751
Lennox, Charlotte	
The female Quixote; or the adventures of Arabella	London 1752

In addition to this list there are four other books that fall either side of Bishop's, and also belong to the memoir genre, although these do not include the words 'life' or 'adventures' in the title.

Defoe, Daniel	
The fortunes and misfortunes of Moll Flanders	London 1722
Swift, Jonathan	
Gulliver's Travels	London 1726
Fielding, Henry	
The History of Tom Jones	London 1749
Cleland, John	
Memoirs of Fanny Hill	London 1750

Whatever one's views on the nature of Bishop's *Life and adventures*, his work falls in the middle of the first, and perhaps most original and highly productive, period in the history of the English novel.

Novel writing was a new literary form which had its essential origins in the early 18thC and the memoir novel was at its foundation. Bishop's work, both by its very title and subject matter, seems to proclaim itself as part of that tradition. His publishers would have known exactly where they were positioning Bishop's *Life and adventures* in the market place. The wording of the title itself was an invitation to

believe that it stood in the tradition of *Robinson Crusoe*, and the buying and reading public would surely have expected something of that type.

Perhaps, however, Bishop's *Life* should be grouped with the memoirs of Avery, Davies and Carew which fall into some intermediate state as founded on real life experience although intermixed with fiction.

Fact or fiction, fiction or fact?

It seems reasonable to assume that the Matthew Bishop of the Deddington Parish Registers was the author of the *Life and adventures*. What more can be learned about him? He comes across as a very confident man with a strong sense of self worth, as someone who saw himself as equal to any man. It is difficult to evaluate some of his reported verbatim conversations with ship's officers and captains; not only did these take place decades earlier but it is curious to read how he seemed to have had such easy access to these men, and how they in turn spoke of him in such adulatory terms, "...your courage exceeds all I ever saw", "...the best man that ever went into a ship", and "...I cannot conceive your genius". All this praise heaped on an ordinary seaman of only three or four years' experience seems improbable.

Supposing one removed Bishop's recollections of those words of praise then what remains would be a narrative full of interest and incident, but not taxing the reader's credulity for the most part. The role Bishop played in the various situations and actions he described would be characteristic of any resourceful, confident and brave young man fighting in the services. The backcloth was one of war by sea and land. Bishop was not describing exceptionally heroic deeds of his own in some far off land, but of a European war with famous British victories; all this was familiar territory to his readers: he was not describing strange encounters in an exotic land. For this reason there are grounds for believing that probably he did take part in the various campaigns he described and acquitted himself with honour, although distance may have embellished his recollections of the praise bestowed on him.

The question of the names of the ships he served on, and the absence of a number of these from standard reference works, presents a problem difficult to

resolve. It may be possible to account for one or two as a slip of memory, such as the *Swift Snow*: Although there is no ship of this name recorded, there was a *Swift Sure*, but possible alternative names for other ships are not so easily found.

The editor wrote that a particular strength of Bishop's narrative, and one that went to bolster its authenticity, was Bishop's disclosure that he wrote "without partiality in his own favour", and that "the good and bad" of his conduct would be revealed. While not stinting on the praise, he does reveal less flattering aspects of his character, which includes the neglect of his wife. He rather cleverly kept this neglect implicit so that when, towards the end of his narrative, the revelation of his wife's remarriage and sudden death came as a total shock and surprise. The early incident of his finding sixty "pieces of eight" is also described in an interesting way. Presented as a hard luck story, it finished with a moral about being careful whom you trust; from another perspective, the way he described the episode was not one of hard luck but rather of theft by finding, or even burglary.

A curious aspect of his memoirs is the extent to which drink appears. There is hardly a significant section where drinking does not feature. He never described himself as having been drunk, but drink makes an appearance regularly: as the basis for his success with the press-gangs in Ireland, his drinking with the officer in Oxford on the way to Deddington with his wife, drinking with his family there and the glass of 'usquebaugh' shared with his aunt; drinking the pub landlord under the table on his return journey through Oxford, using his money to buy drinks for potential recruits on his way to London. He had drinks on board ship, and recorded that one captain even welcomed him on board with a glass of wine. This latter incident tends to make one sceptical about the entire narrative: nevertheless it formed part of a pattern running or, more aptly, flowing throughout his memoirs.

At various points Bishop described scenes where he was either mistaken for an officer, or it was put to him that he should buy a commission, as obviously he appeared to be officer material. As well as reporting these instances, Bishop conveyed the image of himself as a natural leader of men, and described many such incidents where he displayed the necessary qualities. He saw this as a God given trait, "a blessing from the Almighty".

Bishop must have realised that there was a certain incongruity between the self he revealed and his humble position in the fighting services in spite of all he had achieved, or claimed to have done, over the years. He did address the question, although not in a particularly persuasive or convincing way. Despite having successfully conveyed the impression that he was any man's equal and subservient to none, he saw himself nonetheless as an ordinary man, an "insignificant fellow" as he put it, to whom the satisfaction of his time in the services was to have done his duty to King and Country as a volunteer in a just war.

Bishop may well have looked back to this period as the high point in his life but it is slightly curious that he gave so little information about himself outside those twelve years other than to report that he departed for Deddington after the death of his wife in 1713. There is no mention of the name of his son, nor of any other detail of his life in the thirty years that had passed. No reference is made to any remarriage, if indeed he is the Matthew Bishop who married Elizabeth Bazely in 1713 two days after Christmas (an unusual day for a wedding in any year). If his first wife was unhappy with her lot as the neglected spouse of a soldier, then his second, if she was still alive in 1744, would in all probability have been equally unhappy to discover that she did not feature in any way in her husband's *Life and adventures*.

In Bishop's time it was not the custom for authors to make some acknowledgement of their spouses in the preliminary pages or in the dedication, and he did not depart from that custom. Significantly, perhaps, Bishop's dedication was to the Earl of Stair (1673-1747): now long forgotten, Sir John Dalrymple, Second Earl of Stair, was a distinguished man with an interesting past. He rose to a certain early prominence when, as an eight year old, he accidentally shot and killed his younger brother. Banished by his parents he was sent to Holland to be educated, and when old enough joined the army under the Prince of Orange, and fought at the Battle of Steen Kerk in 1692. By 1703 he had become ADC to the Duke of Marlborough and fought with distinction at the Battles of Oudenard and Malplaquet (where Bishop also fought). Subsequently he pursued a career in the diplomatic service; while in Paris he thwarted plans of the 'Old Pretender'. Later in life he returned to military duties and fought at the Battle of Dettingen in 1743: he

was made Commander in Chief for the South of Britain in 1744, the title Bishop used in the dedication of his memoirs, which were published in the same year. This dedication to the Earl of Stair suggests perhaps that Bishop's recollection were based on actual experience and that he remembered the Earl of Stair from his time fighting in Flanders at the Battles of Oudenard and Malplaquet more than thirty five years before.

If the dedication is taken to be generally supportive of Bishop's narrative as recording his actual experience: it is no real surprise nevertheless to find other incidents which tend to undermine that view. For example, his description of returning to Deddington with his wife and how they broke their journey by stopping in Oxford for several days. While there Bishop described meeting an army officer who became their inseparable companion throughout the four or five days they remained there. It is very curious that Bishop related that only after they had parted he realised he had not asked the officer his name or in which regiment he served. This seems implausible and it is difficult to understand why Bishop introduced this episode other than to provide an opportunity to record a conversation where reportedly the officer asked why Bishop did not purchase a commission in the army.

As the title of Bishop's work indicates, his memoirs primarily recorded his time fighting at sea and on land, but also included "...many curious incidents, entertaining conversations and judicious reflections." Where then does the most extraordinary happening in the book fit into this title: one that could hardly be called "a curious incident"? The brief description of his discovery that he was a father, that his wife had remarried, and of his visit to her which resulted in her death: these were life changing and dramatic events, not "curious incidents".

Had Bishop's *Life and adventures* been written as fiction then the dénouement surrounding his wife's death could hardly have been less satisfactorily woven into the story. She had rarely featured with any significance in the text, and the final scenes were described only briefly, almost perfunctorily. and he drew his memoir to a close very shortly afterwards. There had been no careful attempt to integrate the dramatic nature of these events into the wider narrative.

The theme of a soldier long absent while fighting in a war, then returning

to rejoin his wife, is potentially rich in dramatic possibilities relating to memory, recognition, deception and personal identity. Perhaps the most famous case, and one that has had a significant afterlife, is that of Martin Guerre where all these elements became interlinked.

Martin Guerre lived in the 16thC in a French Pyrenean village. In 1546 he left his wife to go to war and did not return until 1556 when he came back and re-established his relationship with her. Suspicions arose about his real identity, and suggestions were made of his being an impostor (despite his wife recognising him) and that the 'real' Martin Guerre was alive but his whereabouts unknown; that he had been injured in the war and had had his leg amputated. Eventually two trials of the 'imposter' Martin were held; he was acquitted at the first, and it was only at the second trial in 1560 at Toulouse that, at a crucial stage, the 'real' Martin Guerre appeared dramatically, limping into the court on his wooden leg. The 'imposter' was convicted and hanged in front of Martin Guerre's house. This true account was related subsequently by Alexander Dumas in his *Celebrated Trials*, and in a fictionalised form in *The Two Dianas*. In 1982 the story was made into a film, *Le Retour de Martin Guerre*, with Gerard Depardieu in the leading role. In the mid 1990s a musical, *Martin Guerre*, was staged in the London West End.

In another film, *Sommersby* (1993), the basis of the story was relocated to a post American Civil War setting. Working on a similar theme, aspects of the Martin Guerre story recur in *A very long engagement*, an adaptation of Sebastien Japrisot's *Un long dimanche de fiançailles*. The dramatic possibilities of these themes of identity and recognition of the returning soldier were also examined by Balzac in *Le Colonel Chabert*. Chabert, presumed dead, returned injured and disfigured from war to find that his wife had remarried and that he was not recognised.

As for Bishop's returning to his wife all the pieces were in place to spin into an elaborate story had he been writing a novel, but his straightforward matter of factness combined with a hint of the ludicrous, where he described going to his wife in disguise wearing a wig loaned by his uncle inclines one to think that it may have been true.

Throughout his memoirs, Bishop conveyed a strong sense of personal

identity and he maintained a momentum to his narrative as he disclosed how his life unfolded during those ten or so years. It is unfair to criticise him for not providing information to readers from another century who may wish to have their curiosity satisfied on points that he never intended to include. He knew what he wanted to say and, interesting though it may be to a later generation to know more from outside the years he described, that did not form part of his purpose.

Bishop also conveyed the image of himself as an engaging, rather vain but resourceful man of ideas and action, and as a writer he enjoyed the use of language and complex words in describing his situation; for example, *confabulations*, *facinerous*, *figaries*, *usquebaugh*, words that are now archaic and were probably of uncommon occurrence even in Bishop's time. He was pleased to record how he brought his nautical experience to bear as he looked down a little on "fresh water sailors", and how he relished the opportunity to mould them into real seamen, "salt water sailors". He made several references to one of the great experiences of his naval life when around 1703 he fought in a major sea battle against the French, and where he was wounded. He called on a classical Roman allusion, "the great Numachia", in referring to that battle and he used the term with pride on a number of occasions when calling to mind his participation in it.

Whether fact or fiction, Matthew Bishop's *Life and adventures* was a remarkable achievement. No evidence exists that he ever wrote anything else; this book was his sole contribution to posterity and it is a substantial one. The work is not extravagant enough, nor sufficiently pointed, to have been an attempt on his part to satirise the genre. If fiction, it takes an honourable place in one of the most remarkable periods in the history of English literature; and, if predominantly fact, reveals a rare and valuable insight into aspects of early 18thC life and of the character of a remarkable man from a humble background. He set out on his great adventure from his home in Deddington in Oxfordshire in pursuit of some "noble exploit" and his legacy is the account of that journey in his *Life and adventures*.



PEDDINGTON.



From a vignette engraved in 1747 by Jacob Houbraken which provided a nautical motif to a portrait by Kneller of George Byng, first Viscount Torrington [1663 – 1737]. Byng was a naval officer who joined the fleet at Vigo in northern Spain in 1702; in the following year he was promoted to Rear Admiral and third in command under Sir Cloudesley Shovel at the time when Bishop was also serving with the fleet.